



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 1941

BIGHORN SHEEP MAKING LAST STAND FOR EXISTENCE IN U. S.

Only about 14,000 bighorn sheep are left in the United States today although these mountain climbers once flourished in most mountain ranges of the West, according to a recent Fish and Wildlife Service report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

The bighorn sheep is making a last stand for existence in 12 States, Service officials said, and Federal, State, and private conservation agencies are bending every effort to save this big-game animal from extinction.

In the latest Fish and Wildlife Service big-game inventory it was estimated that in 1939 there were only some 8,350 Rocky Mountain bighorns and 5,350 desert bighorns in the country.

Some 2,500 Rocky Mountain bighorns were in Wyoming; 2,300 in Colorado; 1,700 in Idaho; 1,200 in Montana; 360 in California; 250 in Utah; 30 in Oregon; 20 in Washington; and 3 in New Mexico. The desert bighorn population included 2,000 in California; 1,800 in Arizona; 1,100 in Nevada; 250 in New Mexico; and 150 in Texas.

In Alaska it is estimated that there are 40,000 Dall, or white, mountain sheep, but some people consider the white sheep not as a bighorn sheep but a different type of animal.

Concentrate on Saving Remnant Herds

Within the past few years, aggressive action has been taken to preserve the last of the bighorns. The Fish and Wildlife Service administers four national wildlife refuges primarily for the protection of Rocky Mountain and desert bighorns.

The Kofa and Cabeza Prieta Game Ranges in Arizona now have an estimated population of 150 bighorns. The Desert Game Range in Nevada reported between 325 and 350 bighorns in July 1940. The San Andres Refuge in New Mexico was recently established for the protection of Mexican bighorn sheep. Though the Boulder Canyon National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada and Arizona is primarily a waterfowl area, it has more than 350 bighorns.

In an attempt to reintroduce the bighorn to its former ranges, and also to scatter the population so that disease, adverse weather, or other disastrous factors cannot wipe out the entire stock, the Service has established small herds of Rocky Mountain sheep on the National Bison Range in Montana, to which 10 bighorns were transplanted, and on the Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon where 23 bighorns were released a few years ago.

The bighorn is also protected on other Federal areas.

Cooperate in Bighorn Study

So serious has the decline of the Rocky Mountain bighorn population become that the State game departments in Wyoming, Idaho, and Colorado have undertaken a fact-finding survey of the situation as a tri-State, Pittman-Robertson project to determine causes for the reduction in bighorn numbers.

The National Park Service, Forest Service, University of Wyoming, Colorado State College, and the Fish and Wildlife Service are cooperating in this study.

Authorities attribute the reduction of the bighorn sheep population to various factors including overshooting by hunters seeking trophies, and by poachers looking

for food, predators, disease, and competition from other big-game animals driven in- to the bighorn sheep range by settlers.

Whether the bighorn sheep will escape extinction cannot be foretold. Present studies indicate that there is a possibility that the bighorn can recover under favorable circumstances, but big-game authorities refuse to place themselves out "on a scientific limb" by positively predicting that the animal will survive.

- C -

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following is included for those who wish to run a longer feature story on this popular big-game animal.

The bighorn sheep is split up into many geographical races and perhaps two or three species. There are at least 10 recognized forms of bighorns in America, of which one, formerly occurring in the Badlands of South Dakota and nearby areas, apparently is extinct.

Known scientifically as Ovis canadensis, the various forms of bighorn sheep are found from the coastal mountains of Alaska to Mexico. The animal is not truly migratory, its bands ranging in restricted areas. Its feeding routes, bedding grounds, and all-round living quarters are invariably in rough, precipitous country, often on or near mountain tops.

Bighorns have a number of popular names: Mountain sheep, brown bighorn, Rocky Mountain bighorn, American ibex, wild sheep, and sheep deer. The bighorn is larger than the domestic sheep and at 2 years weighs about 110 pounds and at 6 years, when it is adult, weighs on the average about 300 pounds.

Living on top and clambering along the sides of high mountains, as it does, has made the bighorn an attraction to big-game hunters. It requires hardihood and expert stalking to place the hunter in a position to get a successful shot.

According to J. Clark Allen, a Fish and Wildlife Service refuge manager,

pioneers dependent upon mountain sheep for meat caused the first and most serious herd reductions of bighorns in the Nevada mountains.

In former years, the scattered and dwindling bands of bighorns were killed by Indians equipped with repeating rifles and by poachers and prospectors waiting at water holes, where a tragic toll of these animals was taken.

Coyotes, mountain lions, and eagles are natural predators, especially during the lambing season, which occurs in April and May. Disease has likewise played a part in reducing the herds.

Total extermination of the animals would soon occur were it not for the protection now being afforded by the establishment of refuges, Allen declares.

Both males and females have horns, but the horns of the ram are larger, sweeping back and around again in a curve. Ram heads with big horns are coveted by trophy-hunting sportsmen. A horn that measures 36 inches around the outside curve from base to tip and 15 inches in girth at the base is considered an excellent specimen.

Surprisingly, a ram's horn shrinks as it dries out.

- C -

for food, predators, disease, and competition from other big-game animals driven into the bighorn sheep range by settlers.

Whether the bighorn sheep will escape extinction cannot be foretold. Present studies indicate that there is a possibility that the bighorn can recover under favorable circumstances, but big-game authorities refuse to place themselves out "on a scientific limb" by positively predicting that the animal will survive.

- C -

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following is included for those who wish to run a longer feature story on this popular big-game animal.

The bighorn sheep is split up into many geographical races and perhaps two or three species. There are at least 10 recognized forms of bighorns in America, of which one, formerly occurring in the Badlands of South Dakota and nearby areas, apparently is extinct.

Known scientifically as Ovis canadensis, the various forms of bighorn sheep are found from the coastal mountains of Alaska to Mexico. The animal is not truly migratory, its bands ranging in restricted areas. Its feeding routes, bedding grounds, and all-round living quarters are invariably in rough, precipitous country, often on or near mountain tops.

Bighorns have a number of popular names: Mountain sheep, brown bighorn, Rocky Mountain bighorn, American ibex, wild sheep, and sheep deer. The bighorn is larger than the domestic sheep and at 2 years weighs about 110 pounds and at 6 years, when it is adult, weighs on the average about 300 pounds.

Living on top and clambering along the sides of high mountains, as it does, has made the bighorn an attraction to big-game hunters. It requires hardihood and expert stalking to place the hunter in a position to get a successful shot.

According to J. Clark Allen, a Fish and Wildlife Service refuge manager,

pioneers dependent upon mountain sheep for meat caused the first and most serious herd reductions of bighorns in the Nevada mountains.

In former years, the scattered and dwindling bands of bighorns were killed by Indians equipped with repeating rifles and by poachers and prospectors waiting at water holes, where a tragic toll of these animals was taken.

Coyotes, mountain lions, and eagles are natural predators, especially during the lambing season, which occurs in April and May. Disease has likewise played a part in reducing the herds.

Total extermination of the animals would soon occur were it not for the protection now being afforded by the establishment of refuges, Allen declares.

Both males and females have horns, but the horns of the ram are larger, sweeping back and around again in a curve. Ram heads with big horns are coveted by trophy-hunting sportsmen. A horn that measures 36 inches around the outside curve from base to tip and 15 inches in girth at the base is considered an excellent specimen.

Surprisingly, a ram's horn shrinks as it dries out.

- C -